

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTIES REPLY TO GOQ INAUGURAL ADDRESS

1. QUEBEC'S TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES TOOK QUITE DIFFERENT SLANTS IN RESPONDING TO PREMIER RENE LEVESQUE'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS LAST WEEK. LIBERAL GERARD D.LEVESQUE STRESSED NEGATIVE IN BLAMING GOVERNMENT FOR CREATING UNCERTAINTY BY PUSHING FOR QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE. HE TABLED A MOTION OF NON CONFIDENCE WHICH IS TRADITIONALLY PART OF OPPOSITION'S REPLY. IN MARKED CONTRAST, UNION NATIONALE LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON DID NOT TABLE SUCH A MOTION. INSTEAD, HE OFFERED SUPPORT OF UN'S 11-MEMBER CAUCUS TO "RENEWAL" PROMISED BY PREMIER LEVESQUE. QUEBEC'S "NEW STYLE" OF GOVERNMENT WOULD BE MET BY A NEW KIND OF OPPOSITION, HE SAID, WHILE ANNOUNCING HIS GROUP WOULD ABSTAIN ON LIBERAL NON-CONFIDENCE MOTION. BIRON DID URGE THAT A SPECIFIC DATE BE SET FOR THE REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE TO HELP RESTORE INVESTOR CONFIDENCE IN QUEBEC.

2. INTERIM LEADER GERARD D. LEVESQUE RECOMMENDED THAT THE REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE BE HELD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, THAT THE ROLE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE BE STRESSED (AS OPPOSED TO SOCIALIST TENDENCIES IN PQ), AND THAT CONFIDENCE IN GOQ BE
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REESTABLISHED. HE SCOLDED PREMIER FOR SETBACK JANUARY 25 NEW YORK SPEECH REPRESENTED AND CALLED ON PQ TO END ITS SEPARATIST "TRIP." IN LIBERAL LEADER'S VIEW, GOQ MUST DO ALL POSSIBLE TO END UNCERTAINTY ON SUBJECT OF QUEBEC'S FUTURE. GERARD LEVESQUE SAID LIBERALS WOULD TAKE ALL STEPS NECESSARY TO ASSURE FREE AND DEMOCRATIC NATURE OF REFERENDUM AND TO SEE THAT ITS WORDING IS CLEAR. REPEATING HIS IMPROMPTU COMMENTS FROM DAY OF INAUGURAL

SPEECH, LEVESQUE FOUND LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE AS LIBERALS HAD PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED 75 PERCENT OF PROGRAM PQ PROPOSED.

3. UNION NATIONALE LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSED GOQ'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM, INCLUDING ITS PLANS FOR A FRENCH LANGUAGE CHARTER FOR QUEBEC, IN HIS REPLY. WHILE URGING JUST AND INTELLIGENT TREATMENT OF ANGLOPHONES, BIRON--WHOSE PARTY CONTAINS ONLY UNILINGUAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING MNA WILLIAM SHAW--MADE NO SUBSTANTIVE CRITISM OF PQ'S EMERGING LANGUAGE POLICY. BIRON STATED HE WAS PLEASED THAT WORD INDEPENDENCE WAS NOT MENTIONED IN PREMIER'S INQUGURAL ADDRESS AS HE PREFERRED THE CALL FOR A NEW KIND OF ASSOCIATION WITH REST OF CANADA. UN LEADER SAID HIS PARTY FAVORED A REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION TO GIVE PROVINCE MORE AUTONOMY. HOWEVER, HE URGED PREMIER TO SET A FIRM DATE FOR HOLDING OF REFERENDUM, SUGGESTION THE SAME TIME AS THE NEXT PROVINCIAL ELECTION DUE IN 1981. HE THUS DISPLAYED MUCH LESS URGENCY THAN LIBERALS. HE URGED PQ TO ACCEPT REFERENDUM RESULTS AS DECISIVE--FOR AT LEAST SEVERAL DECADES--WITH NO NEED FOR ANOTHER SUCH POLL. UN LEADER STATED HE WAS CONVINCED AT LEAST 80 PERCENT OF VOTERS WOULD VOTE NO. BIRON ENDED REPEATING HIS CALL FOR NON-PARTISAN REFERENDUM COUNCIL TO SET GROUND RULES FOR VOTE.

4. COMMENT: AS A NEW MEMBER OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THIS SESSION IS A TEST FOR BIRON. HE IS NEW TO LEADERSHIP AND COMMANDS A PARTY MADE UP LARGELY OF INEXPERIENCED SUPPORTERS. BIRON SURPRISED EVERYONE DURING THE NOVEMBER ELECTION CAMPAIGN RESURRECTING A MORIBUND POLITICAL PARTY. HE MAY NOW BE IN A POSITION TO CARVE UNCLASSIFIED

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OUT FOR HIMSELF A PLACE, SMALL AS IT MAY BE, IN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM OF QUEBEC. LACKLUSTER, CARETAKER LEADERSHIP OF LIBERALS GIVES BIRON MUCH FLAIR BY COMPARISON. ALL OF THIS CONSIDERED, OBSERVERS ARE MYSTIFIED AS TO WHY HE CHOSE TO AVOID FRONTAL ATTACK ON PQ GOVERNMENT. IT COULD BE THAT HE INDEED BELIEVES ELECTION VICTORY BY PQ MERITS A HONEYMOON OF SORTS OR IT COULD BE THAT HE STILL HOPES FORLORNLY TO SEE COSERVATIVE PEQUISTES LEAVE PQ AND JOIN HIS MOVEMENT. HE CERTAINLY SUCCEEDED IN QUICKLY CREATING A PARTY IMAGE APART FROM THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION LIBERAL PARTY. GARLAND

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